

## BALTIYAN AND GILGIT

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491 together, these two are covered with twigs again; on these animals are made to cross, the small sure-footed mountain horse with load gingerly steps forward and slowly proceeds for there is no turning back. In one place at least there still remains a sort of pulley "bridge". This consists of a thick plaited leather rope—some six or eight strands strong. The traveller sits in a rope loop which is suspended from another ring which runs on this rope. He has a line attached to his precarious seat and with this is pulled across, rather after the fashion of a breeches-buoy.

In places the road is made by driving stakes of wood into the rock face, others are rested across these and covered with shale. It is surprising how loose the track will get, how many stakes will have rotted, how close to the cliff face a man will have to get because of the weakened portion, before it is repaired. I have been told by more than one that it was not thought necessary to mend a rope bridge or a made-up, shelf-like track until someone had fallen through or over it. This was explained to me in all seriousness just as I was about to cross one after commenting on the fixed handrail.

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651 The most generally known Gilgit Road is that which goes from Srinagar to Gilgit, a distance of about two hundred and twenty-five miles—fifteen marches. Until close on the end of the last century, the mere mention of the Gilgit Road to a Kashmiri villager terrified not only him but his whole family, for at Gilgit a garrison was maintained by the Kashmir State; this had to be kept supplied, and forced labour—known as "beggars"—was "recruited" for the work. The so-called road was then but a track which could not be used for pack ponies, with the result that coolies had to carry the loads, and the Kashmir State sepoy press-ganged these men from outside the city. On news reaching the villages that the soldiers were searching out coolies, the able-bodied men and usually the whole village made for the hills or forests leaving only the very old and the sick behind. There they would remain until all possibility of the men being taken had passed. If they were so unfortunate as to be caught unawares, only large bribes would buy the sepoys off; for the rest, the families wept and prayed. Even then the aged fathers would not give up hope and followed the troops to where they had collected, for many more men than were needed were brought

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651 to that centre, and here a few could still be heli'd out. It was known that a large percentage would never return to their families. The years thinned the breadwinners, the fields were tended and the crops gathered by the old and very young.

[492] The hundreds of coolies were collected together at Bandipura; here they were loaded up with the sacks of food for the garrison, loads which were two and even three times the recognised pack of fifty pounds. In addition to this they had to carry their own rations, these being about two pounds of rice per day, a carrying crutch, a frame of sticks, rope for the back load, and topping all, a bundle of straw with which to make the straw shoes they would need. Their clothes and protection consisted of whatever they had brought for themselves; most had somehow managed to bring a blanket. It is little wonder that dozens died on the way, as they crossed the snow passes, slipped on the rough track, or dropped from weakness and exposure.

[517] The dreadful thing was that even when they eventually reached Gilgit there was always the chance that they would be sold into slavery or captured by the tribesmen of that part. Tyndale-Biscoe tells of the grandfather of one of his servants, who had been forced to make this march, being exchanged for a Chinese dog; later he escaped and somehow managed to return to the Valley to tell his story. And it was not unusual for those fortunate ones who were returning to be press-ganged again to carry loads that dead or sick men in caravans following had dropped; whilst there was no assurance that next year they might not again be taken.

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658 Then the threat of the Russian advance into India through Kashmir caused the Government of India to take over this Gilgit garrison, and in order to ensure maintenance of lines of communication, in 1891 a military road was made between Gilgit and Bandipura, the place where the coolies had been loaded, for there already existed a road as far as that town. The making of the road in those days was a great engineering achievement in the short space of time that it took. Pathans from the North-West Frontier were used for the work, at times they worked with spade in the hand and rifle at their elbow, the way being through tribal areas where the peoples resented the

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making of a road; but despite all the difficulties it was completed. Much of the work and fighting undertaken in its making was described by Knight in his *Where Three Empires Meet*, a book which became a favourite prize for schoolboys in the Victorian age for no less than three Victoria Crosses were won in the expedition which he describes so vividly.

"On the completion of the road the large, ill-disciplined, ill-equipped garrison that was maintained at enormous expense by the Kashmir State, was supplanted by a small but extremely efficient force under British officers," he says and goes on, "Since then the tribesmen have been reduced to subjection, the Pax Britannica has been extended to the farthest corners of the Gilgit Agency, and the influence of Britain far beyond."

It had culminated with the subjection of the Hunza-Nagars, tribes of raiders who had lived by pouncing on the caravans which passed from Kashgar and Yarkand, to be followed by a small expedition subduing the Chilas.

The country, like Ladakh and Baluchistan, again covers about one hundred and fifty miles on each side of the great River Indus.

Even to this day, because of the heavy snowfalls and danger of avalanches, the road is closed to pack animals during the winter and spring months. Up to the Buzil or Kamti passes the country is well wooded and reasonably fertile with some glorious views from the tops of the passes, and on the way, especially at Gurnais, some delightful camping grounds are to be found, among flowering meadows near firs and pines, with fishing and a fair chance of bagging a red bear. Until long after the British garrison was established there no European ladies were permitted to go beyond these two passes, not even when accompanied by their husbands. Over the 13,500 feet high Buzil pass and the road to Astor, the country is immediately arid and bare, with high, precipitous mountains, again a sportsman's country with magnificent markhor and fine Rex. Most of the marches are now over rough rock wastes which, during the summer months, radiate the terrible heat of the sun; there is no wonderful scenery to relieve the landscape; you find yourself thinking back to stories of the "beggar" coolies who would have trodden this road with heads down,

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499 Before the two new Dominions obtained their independence it was not unusual for the visitor who wanted to see as much as he could of the country, to enter Kashmir from Rawalpindi and leave it via Jammu. The road from Rawalpindi did not exist until the turn of the century and in all probability even then would not have been made had not Russia displayed a threatening attitude towards the northern and western frontiers of India—the Hindu Kush. Then it was that the Government of India, with the help of British engineers, built in record time, for the use of troops, the road which the State of Kashmir had been contemplating for many years, and had in fact started in places. The State engineers had finished the portion between Kohala and Doerel—a little over twenty miles; the distance from there to Baramula, where it was to join the road and the navigable river to Srinagar, was seventy-eight miles further though. The small section they had completed had taken them five years. Spelding, a contractor was called in to finish the job; he brought in his own engineers and gangs of Pathans and Afghan coolies who were the toughest characters, many being deserters from the Indian Army, many murderers who had fled their own country—admittedly murders which had been committed for the honour of their families, but killings just the same. They were hot-tempered men, but good strong workers, and the road, built against what to some would appear insurmountable odds and conditions, was completed and in use within two years.

491 This road from Rawalpindi, a large town on the Pakistan railway between Lahore and Peshawar, is open for most of the year; its blockage by snow seldom lasts for more than two or three days, but the most difficult and dangerous of its troubles is the shale which falls during the rains, mostly in the spring; then the road is blocked until gangs of coolies, which are always stationed there, can clear it, whilst damage and loss of life can also result from a bad fall of shale which often drops without warning. That, it is said, is the main reason why a railway has never been considered to be a practical proposition on this particular route, which would otherwise, joining the main line at Rawalpindi, have given Kashmir easy access all the year round to the sea port of Karachi.

## PHYSICAL ASPECTS

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sources of water, as in the case of Achabal, Vernāg, and Kokarnāg on the south, and Arpal on the east. Islāmābād or Anantnāg, 'the place of the countless springs,' sends out numerous streams. One of these springs, the Maliknāg, is sulphurous, and its water is highly prized for garden cultivation. The Kashmiris are good judges of water. They regard Kokarnāg as the best source of drinking-water, while Chashma Shāhi above the Dal Lake stands high in order of merit.

It is time now for the traveller who has been resting in Srinagar to set out on the great northern road which leads to Gilgit. He will have admired the quaint, insanitary city lying along the banks of the Jhelum, with a length of 3 miles and an average breadth of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles on either side of the river. The houses vary in size from the large and spacious brick palaces of the Pandit aristocrat and his 500 retainers, warmed in the winter by *Asammāns*, to the doll house of three storeys, where the poor shawl-weaver lives his cramped life, and shivers in the frosty weather behind lattice windows covered with paper. In the spring and summer the earthen roofs of the houses, resting on layers of birch-bark, are bright with green herbage and flowers. The canals with their curious stone bridges and shady waterway, and the great river with an average width of eighty yards, spanned by wooden bridges, crowded with boats of every description, and lined by bathing boxes, are well worth studying. The wooden bridges are cheap, effective, and picturesque, and their construction is ingenious, for in design they appear to have anticipated the modern cantilever principle. Old boats filled with stones were sunk at the sites chosen for pier foundations. Piles were then driven and more boats were sunk. When a height above the low-water level was reached, wooden trestles of *dadār* were constructed by placing rough-hewn logs at right angles. As the structure approached the requisite elevation to admit of *chakundris* (house-boats) passing beneath, *dadār* logs were cantilevered. This reduced the span, and huge trees were made to serve as girders to support the roadway. The foundations of loose stones and piles have been protected on the upstream side by planking, and a rough but effective cut-water made. The secret of the stability of these old bridges may, perhaps, be attributed to the skeleton piers offering little or no resistance to the large volume of water brought down at flood-time. It is true that the heavy floods of 1893 swept away six out of the seven city bridges, and that the cumbrous piers tend to narrow the waterway, but it should be remembered

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499. that the old bridges had weathered many a serious flood. Not long ago two of the bridges, the Habba Kadal and the Zaina Kadal, had rows of shops on them reminding one of Old London Bridge, but these have now been cleared away.

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Srinagar to  
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The distance by road from Srinagar to Gilgit is 228 miles, and the traveller can reach Bandipura at the head of the Wular Lake by boat or by land. The Gilgit road, which cost the Kashmir State, in the first instance, 15 lakhs, is a remarkable achievement, and was one of the greatest boons ever conferred on the Kashmiri subjects of the Mahārājā. Previous to its construction supplies for the Gilgit garrison were carried by impressed labourers, many of whom perished on the passes, or returned crippled and maimed by frost-bite on the snow or accident on the goat paths that did duty for roads. The journey to Gilgit before 1890 has been aptly compared with the journey to Siberia. Now, supplies are carried on ponies and the name Gilgit is no longer a terror to the people of Kashmir.

From Bandipura a steep ascent leads to the Raj Diāngan pass (11,800 feet), a most dreaded place in the winter months, when the cold winds mean death to man and beast. Thence through a beautifully wooded and watered country, past the lovely valley of Gurais, down which the Kishangangā flows, the traveller has no difficulties till he reaches the Burzil pass (13,500 feet), below which the summer road to Skārdū across the dreary wastes of the Deosai plains branches off to the north-east. This is a very easy pass in summer, but is very dangerous in a snowstorm or high wind.

Descending from the Burzil the whole scene changes. The forests and vegetation of Kashmir are left behind, the trees are few and of a strange appearance, and the very flowers look foreign. It is a bleak and rugged country, and when Astor (7,853 feet) is left the sense of desolation increases. Nothing can be more dreary than the steep descent from Doian down the side of the arid Hattu Pir into the sterile waste of the Indus valley. It is cool at Doian (8,720 feet); it is stifling at Rāmghāt (3,800 feet), where one passes over the Astor river by a suspension bridge. The old construction was a veritable bridge of sighs to the Kashmir convicts who were forced across the river and left to their fate—starvation or capture by the slave-hunters from Chilās. A little cultivation at Bunji relieves the eye; but there is nothing to cheer the traveller until the Indus has been crossed by a fine bridge, and 30 miles farther the pleasant oasis of Gilgit is reached.

During my absence, Manners-Smith acted for me; 000  
 the long-expected doctor went up to Gilgit in July, George Robertson passed through, *en route* to Kafiristan, and lost all his baggage in the Indus at Bunji, much to his annoyance. On my return from England I found things very much as I had left them, and to my great regret the Resident, Colonel Parry Nisbet, was going home, and another, who knew not Joseph, was to reign in his place. The troops had gone up, or were just leaving, but treasure, stores, and ammunition were all on the wrong side of the passes. I sat down for three weeks and worried the Governor of Kashmir daily till he must have hated the sound of my name; you realise the point of the story of the unjust judge in the East, none but the importunate can get anything done. The arrangements of the Kashmir authorities were just as inept as they had been two years before, and no proper scheme of transport had been worked out. Finally, having got 499 ●  
 all the essentials in money and stores for the troops over, I crossed the passes myself, just in time to avoid the first heavy fall of snow, but having to abandon to next year most of my own stores, and, what was far more important, the *personnel* of the road-making establishment. The engineer of the road got through, but with the scantiest number of skilled workmen, the contractors, with their men, remained behind. It was very disgusting, but one learnt patience by experience, and it was better to delay the road than to have fifteen hundred Pathal and Hazara coolies, for whom no food had crossed the passes, turned loose on the country. The engineer spent his time in hunting for bridge sites, searching for lime, recon-

499 noitring lines of road along the cliffs between Gilgit and Bunji, and in laying out the approaches and collecting material for the bridge over the Indus.

000 My time was now fully occupied at Gilgit. The year before I had drawn up complete schemes for putting the postal and transport arrangements on a proper footing. Both had, of necessity, been shelved, and the matter had to be gone into again. The first difficulty was finally solved by including Kashmir in the Imperial postal system of India, the second by placing the whole of the commissariat and transport arrangements under an officer of the Indian Commissariat Department. These changes were not, however, carried out for another two years, and I had to struggle on as before.

66/ On going into the question of supply I found  
705 that the figures given me the year before by the Governor of Gilgit, with reference to the grain revenue, were incorrect. There was a deficit of over a hundred and forty tons of grain, no light matter with no surplus grain in the country, and a brigade of troops and a mule battery to feed. By dint of the most careful supervision the troops were fed, but at the beginning of June 1891, when the first crop was cut, I had but a week's consumption left in hand. It was most anxious work. My enquiries into the management of the grain stores—the whole revenue of the district was paid in grain—showed that extensive speculation was going on. After weeks of patient investigation, I found that the Governor's right-hand man was the chief culprit. I handed over the papers proving the case up to the hilt against this man to the Governor, who acknowledged his servant's guilt,